International Journal of Global Science Research **ISSN: 2348-8344 (Online)**
Vol. 12, Issue. 1, April 2025, pp. 2500-2502 **DOI: https://doi.org/10.26540/ijgsr.v12.i1.2025.287**
***Available Online* at www.ijgsr.com**

Research Paper

The Impact of Climate Change on Vesicular Arbuscular Mycorrhizae

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Received: 08/01/2025
Revised: 15/01/2025
Accepted: 25/01/2025

Abstract: Climate change is reshaping ecosystems worldwide, with rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, and higher levels of atmospheric CO_2 posing significant challenges to biodiversity and ecological balance. Vesicular arbuscular mycorrhizae (VAM), a vital partnership between plant roots and fungi, play a critical role in enhancing plant nutrient uptake, improving stress tolerance, and maintaining ecosystem health. This paper delves into how climate change could impact these essential symbiotic relationships, focusing on how environmental shifts affect fungal communities and their interactions with host plants. Understanding these dynamics is key to predicting ecosystem responses and developing sustainable solutions for agriculture and natural resource management.

Keywords: Climate change, Ecosystem, Temperature.

Abbreviations: Vesicular arbuscular mycorrhizae (VAM)

Introduction:

Vesicular arbuscular mycorrhizae (VAM) are a fundamental component of healthy ecosystems. These symbiotic associations occur between plant roots and fungi from the Glomeromycota phylum, forming networks that extend through plant roots and soil. VAM provide plants with improved access to critical nutrients like phosphorus, enhance resilience to stresses such as drought and salinity, and contribute to overall ecosystem functionality (Smith and Read, 2008). As climate change introduces new environmental pressures, it becomes increasingly important to understand how these relationships will adapt. How will VAM respond to higher temperatures, altered water availability, and elevated CO_2 levels? And what does this mean for plants, agriculture, and ecosystems? This paper explores these questions, shedding light on the intricate interplay between climate change and VAM dynamics.

Impacts of Climate Change on VAM:

Temperature Effects:

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Rising temperatures directly influence the growth and survival of VAM fungi. Many species have specific temperature ranges where they thrive, and as global temperatures rise, this balance could shift (Treseder, 2004). Some fungi may flourish in warmer conditions, while others may struggle to survive. Changes in community composition are also likely, as some VAM species better suited to higher temperatures outcompete others, potentially reducing biodiversity within fungal communities (Hawkes *et. al.*, 2006).

Precipitation Changes: Altered rainfall patterns, including more frequent droughts and erratic precipitation, significantly impact soil moisture levels, which are critical for VAM survival and functionality (Augé, 2001). Drought conditions can limit the growth of fungal hyphae and reduce spore production, making it harder for fungi to colonize plant roots and provide their benefits (Marulanda et al., 2003).

Elevated Atmospheric CO_2 Levels: Increased CO_2 concentrations often boost plant photosynthesis, providing more carbon for allocation to roots and potentially enhancing VAM colonization (Drigo *et al*., 2010). However, this effect is not uniform. Factors like soil nutrient levels and water availability influence how elevated CO_2 impacts the symbiosis. For instance, if nutrient or water stress outweighs the benefits of increased carbon, VAM colonization could decline (Johnson *et. al*., 2003).

Complex Interactions: Climate change impacts are rarely isolated. Elevated temperatures combined with drought, for example, can compound stress on VAM, reducing their ability to thrive and support plants (Al-Karaki, 2006). Soil characteristics, such as pH, organic matter, and nutrient levels, also interact with climate variables, creating a web of factors that influence VAM dynamics in unpredictable ways (Öpik *et. al.*, 2009).

Implications for Ecosystems and Agriculture

VAM are foundational to ecosystem health, influencing plant diversity, soil structure, and nutrient cycling. Climate change-induced disruptions to VAM could have cascading effects:

For Agriculture: Crops dependent on VAM for nutrient uptake and stress tolerance may become more vulnerable to environmental stressors, reducing yields and threatening food security. Promoting VAM-friendly practices, such as minimizing soil disturbance and incorporating organic matter, will be critical for sustainable farming in a changing climate (Ryan and Smith, 1981).

Future Research Directions

Understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change on VAM requires a multifaceted approach:

Species Resilience: Identifying VAM species or strains that can withstand extreme environmental conditions is crucial. These resilient fungi could be leveraged to support agriculture and restoration projects.

Interactions with Climate Factors: Research should explore how combinations of climate stressors (e.g., heat and drought) affect VAM, providing insights into how they may adapt or decline under future scenarios.

Application in Agriculture: Studies should investigate the potential of VAM to enhance crop resilience, focusing on practical applications like inoculating soils with beneficial fungi or developing VAM-friendly crop varieties.

Conclusion:

Climate change presents a significant challenge to the delicate balance between plants and VAM fungi. Rising temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, and elevated CO_2 levels are poised to directly and indirectly affect these symbiotic relationships, with wide-ranging consequences for ecosystems and agriculture. By deepening our understanding of how VAM respond to climate change and exploring innovative ways to harness their benefits, we can better prepare for the ecological and agricultural challenges of the future. Investing in research, conservation, and sustainable practices will ensure that these vital partnerships continue to support life on Earth in an era of unprecedented environmental change.

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